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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Wednesday, May 13, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "HOME BUSINESS." Information from the Extension Service, United States Department of Agriculture.

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The successful business women of the United States are not all in the cities -- not by any means. You have only to read the reports from home demonstration clubs in the different States to realize how many homemakers on farms have built up businesses selling their homemade or homegrown products.

Suppose I give you some brief glimpses of home industries that were successful during the last year.

Let's hear first how one agent in Virginia reports on the money-making activities of the women in her county. Perhaps you have already heard about Mrs. Burton's sweet-potato pie mixture. For more than 3 years this farm homemaker in Virginia has been selling a pie-mixture made from sweetpotatoes from her husband's patch. She packs the mixture in cans, processes it according to the best canning directions and labels the cans with attractive labels. You can find this pie-mixture on the shelves of most of the local grocery stores but its fame has been spreading. Mrs. Burton has had orders from west of the Mississippi.

Other market specialties of these Virginia farm women are home-canned vegetables and fig and strawberry preserves. Strawberries were expensive last year but one woman made and sold very profitably 4 dozen pints of preserve from just 1 row in her garden.

Another woman in this county has built up a good market for her candied mint leaves.

Among the handicrafts that have proved money-makers in this county are splint basket making, reconditioning furniture, carpet weaving, hooked rugs, quilting, and crocheting afgans.

Splint basket-making is a highly developed craft among the homemakers and their families in this county in Virginia. They make baskets in 3 styles: the sturdy, oval-bottom utility baskets; the delicate plank-bottom flower or sewing baskets; and the rectangular baskets with woven bottoms that vary in size from doll baskets to oyster baskets.

Both hooking and weaving rugs are popular crafts that help furnish farm homes and bring in a little extra cash frequently. Several women have reassembled the hand looms of their grandparents and are making and selling rag carpets and mats. One woman already has worked up a good business of weaving large rugs which her customers have already cut in strips and sewed together.

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Now let's look in on the Alabama lady who makes and sells corn-shuck dolls. Maybe you have heard about her. She has been selling her dolls for some years now to gift shops, bazaars and private individuals who want them for favors and gifts. She has made and sold more than 400 of these dolls and, when she last reported, had orders on hand for 65 dolls. Two of her neighbors have now joined her in the shuck-doll business. Naturally, she does the most business at Christmas time. This year when business slowed down in January she began specializing on window exhibits for stores in nearby towns. She reports that making these dolls takes up practically all of her spare time and that frequently she works late at night to fill orders.

Farm women members of home demonstration clubs in two counties in Florida report success in their marketing venture last year. In Gadsden County, 87 women filled an order for 5500 quarts of lady-finger peas, butterbeans and vegetable mixture. This work was closely supervised by the agent and the women were careful to maintain the highest standards of quality. In addition to this one large order, the women have sold about 4500 quarts of various canned products through 3 local stores.

Other women in the county have been successful in selling dressed poultry and eggs. The total sale from poultry and eggs was 3427 dollars. Then, 4 women worked together on gift packs of citrus products. One made a specialty of basket-weaving and sold 40 dollars' worth of baskets last year.

Here is a report of a home venture in Arkansas. I'll quote the report exactly as it is written: "Gobble, gobble, gobble is a familiar sound to the ears of Mrs. W. F. Smith of Logan County. Her hobby is raising turkeys for the Thanksgiving dinner. She sells all her flock each year except 5 hens and a tom which she keeps so she may have eggs for the next spring. From 150 eggs set, 102 hatched this year. She feeds her turkeys mash and corn. Mrs. Smith had about 60 birds ready for last Thanksgiving and realized over a hundred dollars from the sale. She estimated that the cost of raising them was about 30 dollars. She sold 305 pounds of live turkeys to the State Sanatorium at 20 cents a pound."

Several women in different parts of the country have been making a little cash from selling homemade buttons. One woman in Arkansas makes buttons that are cross-sections of walnuts, polished and shellacked.

As you see from the figures I have quoted, none of these small businesses have made their owners fabulously wealthy. Many of them are spare-time hobbies. But the reports say that the money these women made often went for much-needed home furnishings, for music lessons for the children, for dentist and doctor bills, and for the little extras that these farm families could not have had otherwise. Through these ventures, many women learned the value of better standards of cooking and canning, and of producing high-quality products generally. They also report learning the value of good book-keeping and business methods generally. And many of them speak of enjoying the social contacts made at the markets.

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